

A discussion paper on the Nicaraguan Resistance

**FROM A PROXY FORCE TO A NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENT**

Bruce Cameron

Penn Kemble

(The following paper is intended merely to stimulate discussion and debate among friends of the Nicaraguan democratic resistance. The views of the authors are tentative, and we welcome corrections, argument, and additional suggestions. This paper is not for circulation or quotation.)

February 1986

## **FROM A PROXY FORCE TO A NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENT**

Debate about U.S. assistance to the democratic resistance in Nicaragua has been cast as a debate between those who favor U.S. assistance to the armed opposition and those who believe we should seek an accommodation with the Sandinista regime. This debate has obscured and confused consideration of another set of critical problems: how should the U.S. provide the most effective military and political assistance to the insurgents, and what general strategy should guide our aid program? These questions will become more pressing during coming months, as controversy grows over whether the U.S. should provide direct military aid to the Nicaraguan insurgency. It is our hope that this debate will now move beyond the deadlocked ideological dispute over interventionism and isolationism, toward a discussion of how the United States might best contribute to building an effective and democratic opposition movement in Nicaragua.

When the Sandinistas imposed a state of emergency in Nicaragua last October and launched their sweeping assault on Nicaragua's independent labor, church, press and human rights organizations, they forced a fundamental change in the moral problem Nicaragua poses to the world's democracies. In Daniel Ortega's comments to the press during his October visit to the United Nations, and in the conduct of Sandinista leaders since, it has been clear that the Nicaraguan government is determined to crush its opponents by force -- even at great cost to the Sandinistas' claims to represent liberation and progress for the Nicaraguan people. This represents a stark challenge to those who support Nicaragua's democrats. We must either stand back while the Sandinista police and military machine (supplied and increasingly manned by Cuba and the Soviet bloc) eliminates our friends, or we must respond with increased assistance of our own. It is clear that unless the United States now provides the military

assistance which, with some justice, it so far has withheld, the Sandinistas will win a devastating victory.

But the problem we face cannot be solved so simply. We have no moral justification for increasing our military aid to the insurgents unless there are reasonable grounds to believe that in time they can succeed in forcing the Sandinistas to make good the democratic promise of the Nicaraguan Revolution. If the insurgents are defeated after we have begun giving them military assistance, we will pay a high political price. Unless the insurgency has the practical potential to succeed, our real choices are either to press the U.S. to do the job itself, or to move back toward an aid program that will make the dissolution of the Nicaraguan opposition and the consolidation of Sandinista authority as humane a process as it can possibly be. (This was the underlying purpose of the Barnes-Hamilton resolution that was narrowly defeated in the House of Representatives last June.)

The crucial issue for the coming round of debate on Central America is, then, will U.S. military assistance to the Nicaraguan insurgency give it a reasonable chance of success? And, if not, are there additional things the U.S. and others might do to create that possibility of success?

As it stands today, it seems unlikely that the resistance can achieve much against the Sandinistas even with substantial U.S. military assistance. But if military assistance is given and at the same time firm steps are taken to strengthen the social and political character of the resistance and to overcome its diplomatic isolation, its prospects will be greatly improved -- and military assistance can be justified.

Some will be tempted to dismiss this proposition as another disruptive intrusion by political considerations into a matter which should be left to military experts. We would argue that so long as the U.S. is unwilling to

intervene directly in the Nicaraguan civil war, military success depends heavily upon political factors: upon Nicaragua's internal political climate, upon the acceptance the insurgency gains from Nicaragua's neighbors, and upon the stance of key Latin American and Western European powers toward the conflict. Until the political balance shifts decisively against the Sandinistas, both within and outside Nicaragua, their military capabilities will enable them to withstand any challenge short of direct U.S. engagement.

### **Political Limitations and Military Consequences**

At present, the Nicaraguan resistance movement is a curious hybrid which combines three elements: 1) The first is the original U.S. proxy force (a creation which lacked a popular social base within the country, and had the limited purpose of harassing the Sandinistas, perhaps to create "bargaining chips.") 2) The second is a mass of Nicaraguan peasant recruits, who gathered around the "contras" in bitter reaction against the Sandinistas' policies in rural areas. 3) The third element is an assortment of disaffected figures from the leadership of the Nicaraguan revolution itself: men such as Arturo Cruz and Alfonso Robelo, who represent elements of Nicaragua's democratic middle class and intelligensia.

This miscellany of social and political forces has proved far more effective and attractive than most observers expected. It continues to attract military recruits, and its standing has grown significantly in the eyes of many Latin American observers. But the bravery and accomplishments of the democratic resistance should blind no one to the fact that in its present condition it cannot, even with more and better weapons, contend effectively

with the the Sandinista fighting forces. This is a pivotal judgement, and it deserves the most thorough discussion. For brevity's sake we can here simply assert the reasons that have led us to it:

1. The rank-and-file troops of the insurgency come in disproportionate numbers from very poor rural backgrounds and often lack the skills and aptitudes for modern warfare, especially small unit guerilla warfare. They cannot do such things as read maps, repair and maintain mechanical equipment, keep to organized schedules or carry out complex tactical maneuvers. By comparison, the front-line Sandinista combat troops include larger numbers of urban and working class youth who, whatever their morale, are better prepared for the tasks they face.
2. The relatively low cultural level of the insurgent forces makes them especially unsuited to small unit guerilla operations. They need attentive leadership if they are to operate effectively. But the insurgents have not attracted adequate numbers of more educated and motivated junior commanders needed to lead these troops. The Sandinistas have many weaknesses of their own, but they have had time to turn a number of their young militants into effective field officers.
3. The lack of technical competency among the insurgents will make it difficult to introduce quantities of more modern weapons and communications into their effort. At a minimum, their troops will need substantial training.
4. The command structure of the FDN forces is still heavily influenced by figures from Nicaragua's old order. These leaders are not the brutes that some make them out to be, but they do not generate the enthusiasm and loyalty of which the insurgency is capable.
5. The "proxy force" mentality lingers on in the insurgents' leadership -- a mentality that leads to caution, dependency and, perhaps, the unspoken expectation that sooner or later their U.S. patron will come in to do the job itself.

These difficulties in the internal composition of the insurgent movement reflect political problems that persist in the movement's relations with both the larger Nicaraguan society and with Nicaragua's neighbors.

1. Despite the quiet satisfaction many urban and middle class Nicaraguans take from the existence of an anti-Sandinista insurgency, they do not yet regard it as theirs. It is not so much that the U.S. supports the insurgency as it is that the insurgency is a creature of the U.S.

2. The insurgency has not sought close ties with democratic forces which remain on the "inside" in Nicaragua -- on the contrary, some of its leaders have scornfully urged members of Nicaragua's civic opposition to "come out." This may have been understandable when the presence of opponents in Managua and other urban centers could be exploited as testimony to the Sandinistas' democratic pretensions. But since the state of emergency was declared these pretensions have grown very thin. The insurgency now needs closer links to dissidents in the cities. The Sandinistas cannot be opposed successfully by a movement that operates only in the countryside; to be effective, the insurgency must develop an urban base.
3. Political conflicts among opponents of the Sandinista regime have brought armed opposition to a virtual stand-still on the Southern (Costa Rican) front. This permits the Sandinistas to concentrate their best forces against the FDN command on the Northern (Honduran) front, and gravely hinders the guerilla campaign.
4. The limited political appeal of the insurgency diminishes the movement's standing in the eyes of the peoples who are Nicaragua's neighbors, enabling neighboring governments to at times show a destructive opportunism toward the logistical and communications needs of the insurgents.
5. Some Latin American governments which are critical to the success of the insurgency -- Venezuela, Colombia -- still give political excuses for holding back their support, while some Western European democracies -- Sweden, France -- even provide economic assistance to the Sandinistas. But every reasonable effort must be made to overcome this both by the U.S. and by the insurgents themselves.

#### **What Can Be Done?**

The Nicaraguan insurgents clearly need a major infusion of U.S. military assistance. But our arms and training will be useless unless the political and social character of the resistance is broadened and becomes stronger. It would be the most profound irresponsibility to train and equip guerilla fighters for a mission that is essentially futile. So long as their military operations rest upon so narrow a political base, the capacities of the insurgents will be gravely weakened.

In briefest outline, we believe that the political requirements for U.S. military assistance are:

**1. Strengthen the Democratic Character of the Resistance.**

Changes that could achieve this have been treated both by the Reagan Administration and key leaders of the insurgency as if their only value were their public relations usefulness here in the United States. We disagree. They are essential for military success in Nicaragua. Without such changes, the insurgency will never be truly Nicaraguan, nor will it be broadly popular. Nor, it needs hardly be said, will it win.

What, specifically, seems to be required is that:

- A. UNO must exercise full and effective command over all military forces and political activities. Divisions among resistance groups should be replaced by a more organic unity.
- B. A determined effort must begin at once to bring the political and military forces of the Southern Front into a close working relationship with UNO in all phases of its activities. A similar effort must be directed toward the popular leaders of Nicaragua's Indian and Creole communities.
- C. The monitoring and enforcement of the conduct of resistance forces with respect to human rights must begin in earnest. So far this program, which President Reagan pledged to insist upon in his letter last June to Congressman Dave McCurdy, has produced only the most modest beginnings.
- D. The insurgency must develop a determined program of propaganda and recruitment aimed at potential middle class and working class supporters. It must become an all-Nicaraguan movement, which draws upon the best qualities of all sectors of Nicaraguan society. It must overcome the danger of sociological isolation.
- E. Although such efforts must keep clear of direct involvement with the insurgents, non-violent civic protest and dissent should be encouraged throughout Nicaragua.

**2. Mount an International Political Offensive**

- A. Both the insurgents themselves and the United States government need a clear, simple statement of the goals and strategies of this campaign. It is impossible to win serious allies and supporters to an effort which is so closely guarded and ambiguous.
- B. The resistance greatly needs to improve its capacities for waging "the war of ideas." Response to Sandinista actions

and statements is often slow and inept. Too often the U.S. government fills the breach. A stronger presence in Washington on the part of UNO's political leaders could be very helpful.

Sandinista repression has now shattered any remaining illusions that Nicaragua has been moving -- in ways not understood by the ordinary observer -- in a humane and progressive direction. If their present campaign of repression can be successfully resisted, the Sandinistas will soon find themselves more isolated and more vulnerable to diplomatic, economic and internal political pressures. The United States government, together with Nicaraguan democratic leaders and all other friends of democracy, must undertake a massive campaign of public diplomacy and education to cut off support for the Sandinistas and to win support for the resistance.

- C. Democracy has grown stronger in Central and South America in the past year, and many of the region's democratic leaders show a clearer understanding of the Sandinistas' role in fomenting violence and subversion. Because of this, there is a growing possibility that substantial pressure can now be mounted through the Contadora process to push the Sandinistas toward democracy and negotiations. Our diplomacy should encourage a vigorous revival of the Contadora process, while adhering firmly to the conviction that peace and freedom will not be secure for the rest of Central America so long as the government of Nicaragua denies peace and freedom to its people.
- D. There appears to be no organized "resistance support network" either in Central America or inside the United States. The Sandinistas have surely shown how helpful such networks can be. It seems likely that there are numbers of citizens who would like to be informed, write letters, pressure their Congressmen, etc. The "proxy war" mentality ignores such potential supporters such as these. Certainly more of an effort must be made by credible representatives of the resistance to reach and win the loyalty of citizens here in the United States. All this is equally true with respect to Central America.
- E. We think it would be advisable to create a high level, bipartisan and broadly representative citizens' commission to act as a liason agency between the United States and Nicaragua's insurgents. There need to be many closer relationships between those active in the Nicaraguan resistance and the leaders of America's democratic movements and institutions: labor, business, the universities, civic organizations, etc. It would also be helpful to offset some of the spirit of partisan politics that weighs so heavily upon this effort. A blue ribbon Committee of Liason could help keep the American public informed in an unbiased way, could offer leadership and assistance to resistance leaders (not just conditions and complaints),



and could help a busy Congress and a strong-willed President shape more effective legislation and policy.

Paradoxical as it may seem, the kind of effort we envision would require greater, not less, U.S. involvement. But, in relative terms, our role would include more open political and diplomatic activity, and would not continue to be so much a matter of closeted logistical and tactical advice.

### **3. Give Substantial Military Assistance.**

A Nicaraguan insurgency which is moving rapidly toward becoming a genuinely popular political alternative to the Sandinistas will be destroyed unless it has the weapons and the training to defend itself against the Sandinistas massive and growing military power, and has them soon.

It will need sophisticated anti-aircraft weapons, including missiles.

It will need the best quality intelligence.

It will need expert military training.

It will need an expert, dependable logistics operation, which must include a capability to resupply forces inside Nicaragua both by sea and air.

Many Americans understandably imagine that U.S. military aid to the insurgents will lead to a great increase in the numbers killed and wounded in Nicaragua's civil war. But the kind of assistance that the insurgents most need -- training, communications, and anti-aircraft -- could actually help limit the casualties among both military personnel and civilians. What the insurgents need is the capability to attack well-defined military targets, and to escape retaliation from the massive firepower of the Sandinista army. They also need to be able to protect their own bases, political structure, and educational operations from Sandinista attack. Resistance leaders do not believe that they can mount a frontal military challenge to the Sandinistas -- they agree that their hopes lie in the development of a more broad-based internal political opposition. When their need for our military assistance is placed in this context, it can win support from many in this country who may now be reluctant to grant it.

**DRAFT FOLLOWS**

January 20, 1986

**MEMORANDUM**

TO: Bob Leiken, Bruce Cameron

FROM: Penn Kemble

This is something I rushed off yesterday because I was too agitated to do anything else. Please treat it as nothing more than a help to producing a more finished product.

## FROM A PROXY FORCE TO A NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENT

The debate about U.S. assistance to the democratic resistance in Nicaragua has so far been cast as a debate between those who favor U.S. assistance to the armed opposition and those who believe we must come to terms with the Sandinista regime. This indeed is an important debate. But it can at times obscure and confuse consideration of another equally important matter: how can the U.S. provide the most effective military and political assistance to the insurgents, and what general strategy should guide our aid program? These questions will become more pressing as controversy grows over whether or not the U.S. should provide direct military aid to the insurgency.

When the Sandinistas imposed a state of emergency in Nicaragua last October and launched their sweeping assault on Nicaragua's independent labor, church, press and human rights organizations, they forced a fundamental change in the moral problem Nicaragua poses to the world's democracies. In Daniel Ortega's comments to the press during his October visit to the United Nations, and in the conduct of Sandinista leaders since, it has been clear that the Nicaraguan government is determined to crush its opponents by force -- even at great cost to the Sandinistas' claims to represent liberation and progress for the Nicaraguan people. This represents a stark challenge to those who support Nicaragua's democrats. We must either stand back while the Sandinista police and military machine (supplied and increasingly manned by Cuba and the Soviet bloc) eliminates our friends, or we must respond with increased assistance of our own. It is clear that unless we now provide the military assistance which, with some justice, we have so far withheld, the Sandinistas will win a devastating victory.

But our problem is not simple. We have no moral justification for increasing our military aid to the insurgents unless there are reasonable grounds to believe that in time they can succeed in forcing the Sandinistas to make good the democratic promise of the Nicaraguan Revolution. Once we embark upon a military aid program, the practical consequences of defeat are also far higher. Unless the insurgency has the practical potential to succeed, our real choices are either to do the job ourselves, or to move back toward an aid program that will make the dissolution of the Nicaraguan opposition and the consolidation of Sandinista authority as humane a process as it can possibly be (the underlying purpose of the Barnes-Hamilton resolution that was narrowly defeated in the House of Representatives last June.)

The crucial issue for the coming round of debate on Central America is, then, will U.S. military assistance to the Nicaraguan insurgency give it a reasonable chance of success? And, if not, are there additional things to be done to create that possibility of success?

As it stands today, it seems unlikely that the resistance can achieve much against the Sandinistas even with substantial U.S. military assistance. But if military assistance is given and at the same time firm steps are taken to strengthen the social and political character of the resistance, its prospects are much better -- and military assistance can be justified.

Some will be tempted to dismiss this proposition as another disruptive intrusion by ideological considerations into what should be a narrow issue of military strategy. We would argue that so long as the U.S. is unwilling to intervene directly in the Nicaraguan civil war, military success depends entirely upon political factors: upon Nicaragua's internal political climate, upon the acceptance the insurgency gains from Nicaragua's neighbors, and upon the stance of key Latin American and Western European powers toward the

conflict. Until the political balance shifts decisively against the Sandinistas, both within and outside Nicaragua, their military capabilities will enable them to withstand any challenge short of direct U.S. engagement.

### **Political Limitations and Military Consequences**

At present, the Nicaraguan resistance movement is a curious hybrid which combines three elements: 1) The first is the original U.S. proxy force (a creation which lacked a popular social base within the country, and had the limited purpose of harassing the Sandinistas, perhaps to create "bargaining chips.") 2) The second is a mass of Nicaraguan peasant recruits, who gathered around the "contras" out of anger toward the Sandinista's policies in rural areas. 3) The third element is an assortment of disaffected figures from the leadership of the Nicaraguan revolution itself: men such as Arturo Cruz and Alfonso Robelo who represent elements of the democratic middle class and intelligensia.

This miscellany of social and political forces has proved far more effective and attractive than most observers expected. It continues to attract military recruits, and its standing has grown significantly in the eyes of many Latin American observers. But the bravery and accomplishments of the democratic resistance should blind no one to the fact that in its present condition it cannot, even with more and better weapons, contend effectively with the Sandinista fighting forces. This is a pivotal judgement, and it deserves thorough discussion; for brevity's sake we can here simply assert the reasons that bring us to it:

1. The rank-and-file troops of the insurgency came from very poor rural backgrounds and often lack the skills and aptitudes for modern warfare, even guerilla warfare. They cannot do such things as read maps, repair and maintain mechanical equipment, keep to organized schedules or carry out complex tactical maneuvers. By comparison, the front-line Sandinista combat troops include larger numbers of urban and working class youth who, whatever their morale, are better prepared for the tasks they face.
2. The relatively low cultural level of the insurgent forces makes them especially unsuited to small unit guerilla operations. They need attentive leadership if they are to operate effectively. But the insurgents have not attracted adequate numbers of more educated and motivated junior commanders needed to lead these troops. The Sandinistas have many weaknesses of their own, but they have had time to turn a number of their young militants into effective field officers.
3. The lack of technical competency among the insurgents will make it difficult to introduce substantial weapons and communications into their effort. At a minimum, their troops will need substantial training.
4. The command structure of the FDN forces is still dominated by figures from Nicaragua's old order. These leaders are not the brutes that some make them out to be, but they do not generate the enthusiasm and loyalty of which the insurgency is capable.
5. The "proxy force" mentality lingers on in the FDN -- a mentality that leads to caution, dependency and, perhaps, the unspoken expectation that sooner or later the U.S. patron will come in to do the job himself.

These difficulties in the internal composition of the insurgent movement reflect political problems that persist in the movement's relations with both the larger Nicaraguan society and with Nicaragua's neighbors.

1. Despite the quiet satisfaction many urban and middle class Nicaraguans take from the existence of an anti-Sandinista insurgency, they do not regard it as theirs. It is not so much that the U.S. supports the insurgency as it is that the insurgency is a creature of the U.S. (and its former allies in the ancien regime.)
2. The insurgency has not sought close ties with democratic forces which remain on the "inside" -- on the contrary, its leaders have scornfully urged members of Nicaragua's civic opposition to "come out." This may have been understandable when the

presence of opponents in Managua and other urban centers could be exploited for testimony to the Sandinistas' democratic pretensions. But since the state of emergency was declared, these pretensions now need closer links to dissidents in the cities. The Sandinistas cannot be opposed successfully by a movement that operates only in the countryside; to be effective, the insurgency must develop an urban base.

3. Political conflicts have brought armed opposition to a virtual stand-still on the Southern (Costa Rican) front. This permits the Sandinistas to concentrate their best forces against the FDN command on the Northern (Honduran) front.
4. The narrow political appeal of the insurgency diminishes the movement's standing in the eyes of the peoples who are Nicaragua's neighbors, enabling neighboring governments to at times show a destructive opportunism toward the logistical and communications needs of the insurgents.
5. Some Latin American governments which must support the insurgency if it is to succeed -- Venezuela, Colombia -- still give political excuses for holding back, while some Western European democracies -- Sweden, France -- even provide economic assistance to the Sandinistas. It may be that there is very little the insurgents themselves or the United States can do to overcome this, but every reasonable effort should be made.

#### What Can Be Done?

The Nicaraguan insurgents clearly need a major infusion of U.S. military assistance. But our arms and training will be useless unless the political and social character of the resistance is broadened and becomes stronger. It would be the most profound irresponsibility to train and equip guerilla fighters for a mission that is essentially futile. So long as their military operations rest upon so narrow and ineffectual a political base, the capacities of the insurgents will be gravely weakened.

In briefest outline, we believe that the political requirements for U.S. military assistance are:



**1. Strengthen the Democratic Character of the Resistance.**

Changes along these lines have been treated both by the Reagan Administration and key leaders of the insurgency as if their only value were their public relations usefulness here in the United States. We disagree. They are essential for military success in Nicaragua. Without such changes, the insurgency will never be truly Nicaraguan, nor will it be broadly popular. Nor, it needs hardly be said, will it win.

What, specifically, seems to be required is that:

- A. UNO must exercise full and effective command over all military forces. The FDN should now be dissolved.
- B. A determined effort must begin at once to bring the political and military forces of the Southern Front into a close working relationship with UNO in all phases of its activities. A similar effort must be directed toward the chosen leaders of Nicaragua's Indian and Creole communities.
- C. The monitoring and enforcement of the conduct of resistance forces with respect to human rights must begin in earnest. So far this program, which President Reagan pledged to insist upon in his letter last June to Congressman Dave McCurdy, has produced only the most modest beginnings.
- D. The insurgency must develop a determined program of propaganda and recruitment aimed at potential middle class and working class supporters. It must become an all-Nicaraguan movement, which draws upon the best qualities of all sectors of Nicaraguan society. It must overcome the danger of sociological isolation.
- E. While such efforts must keep clear of direct involvement with the insurgents, non-violent civic protest and dissent should be encouraged throughout Nicaragua.

**2. Mount an International Political Offensive**

- A. Both the insurgents themselves and the United States government need a clear, simple statement of the goals and strategies of this campaign.
- B. The resistance greatly needs to improve its capacities for waging "the war of ideas." Response to Sandinista actions and statements is often slow and inept. Too often the U.S. government fills the breach. A stronger presence in Washington could be very helpful.

- C. There appears to be no organized "resistance support network" either in Central America or inside the United States. The Sandinistas have surely shown how helpful such networks can be. It seems likely that there are numbers of citizens who would like to be informed, write letters, pressure their Congressmen, etc. The "proxy war" mentality ignores such potential supporters such as these. Certainly more of an effort must be made by credible representatives of the resistance to reach and win the loyalty of citizens here in the United States.
- D. We think it would be most advisable to create a high level, bi-partisan and broadly representative citizens' commission to act as a liason agency between the United States and Nicaragua's insurgents. There needs to be many closer relationships between those active in the Nicaraguan resistance and the leaders of America's democratic movements and institutions: labor, business, the universities, civic organizations, etc. It would also be helpful to offset some of the spirit of partisan politics that weighs so heavily upon this effort. A blue ribbon Committee of Liason could help keep the American public informed in an unbiased way, could offer leadership and assistance to resistance leaders (not just conditions and complaints), and could help a busy Congress and a strong-willed President shape more effective legislation and policy.

### 3. Give Substantial Military Assistance.

A Nicaraguan insurgency which moves rapidly toward becoming a genuinely popular political alternative to the Sandinistas will be destroyed unless it has the weapons and the training to defend itself against the Sandinistas massive and growing military power.

It will need sophisticated anti-aircraft weapons, including missiles.

It will need the best quality intelligence.

It will need expert training.

But an insurgency that is politically broader and more attractive can make good use of such aid, and, can, we think, turn the tide for democracy in that cruelly abused land.

# # #

**ANNOTATED COPY OF DRAFT FOLLOWS**

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Penn Kemble

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When the Sandinistas imposed a state of emergency in Nicaragua last October and launched their sweeping assault on Nicaragua's independent labor, church, press and human rights organizations, they forced a fundamental change in the moral problem Nicaragua poses to the world's democracies. In Daniel Ortega's comments to the press during his October visit to the United Nations, and in the conduct of Sandinista leaders since, it has been clear that the Nicaraguan government is determined to crush its opponents by force — even at great cost to the Sandinistas' claims to represent liberation and progress for the Nicaraguan people. This represents a stark challenge to those who support Nicaragua's democrats. We must either stand back while the Sandinista police and military machine (supplied and increasingly manned by Cuba and the Soviet bloc) eliminates our friends, or we must respond with increased assistance of our own. It is clear that unless the United States now provides the military

assistance which, with some justice, it so far has withheld, the Sandinistas will win a devastating victory.

But the problem we face cannot be solved so simply. We have no moral justification for increasing our military aid to the insurgents unless there are reasonable grounds to believe that in time they can succeed in forcing the Sandinistas to make good the democratic promise of the Nicaraguan Revolution. If the insurgents are defeated after we have begun giving them military assistance, we will pay a high political price. Unless the insurgency has the practical potential to succeed, our real choices are either to press the U.S. to do the job itself, or to move back toward an aid program that will make the dissolution of the Nicaraguan opposition and the consolidation of Sandinista authority as humane a process as it can possibly be. (This was the underlying purpose of the Barnes-Hamilton resolution that was narrowly defeated in the House of Representatives last June.)

The crucial issue for the coming round of debate on Central America is, then, will U.S. military assistance to the Nicaraguan insurgency give it a reasonable chance of success? And, if not, are there additional things the U.S. and others might do to create that possibility of success?

As it stands today, it seems unlikely that the resistance can achieve much against the Sandinistas even with substantial U.S. military assistance.

But if military assistance is given and at the same time firm steps are taken to strengthen the social and political character of the resistance and to overcome its diplomatic isolation, its prospects will be greatly improved -- and military assistance can be justified.

Some will be tempted to dismiss this proposition as another disruptive intrusion by political considerations into a matter which should be left to military experts. We would argue that so long as the U.S. is unwilling to

intervene directly in the Nicaraguan civil war, military success depends heavily upon political factors: upon Nicaragua's internal political climate, upon the acceptance the insurgency gains from Nicaragua's neighbors, and upon the stance of key Latin American and Western European powers toward the conflict. Until the political balance shifts decisively against the Sandinistas, both within and outside Nicaragua, their military capabilities will enable them to withstand any challenge short of direct U.S. engagement. *Exalt*

### Political Limitations and Military Consequences

At present, the Nicaraguan resistance movement is a curious hybrid which combines three elements: 1) The first is the original U.S. proxy force (a *FDN* creation which lacked a popular social base within the country, and had the limited purpose of harassing the Sandinistas, perhaps to create "bargaining chips.") 2) The second is a mass of Nicaraguan peasant recruits, who gathered around the "contras" in bitter reaction against the Sandinistas' policies in rural areas. 3) The third element is an assortment of disaffected figures from the leadership of the Nicaraguan revolution itself: men such as Arturo Cruz and Alfonso Robelo, who represent elements of Nicaragua's democratic middle class and intelligensia.

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with the the Sandinista fighting forces. This is a pivotal judgement, and it deserves the most thorough discussion. For brevity's sake we can here simply assert the reasons that have lead us to it:

- poor training  
poor leadership  
vs.  
better trained*
1. The rank-and-file troops of the insurgency come in disproportionate numbers from very poor rural backgrounds and often lack the skills and aptitudes for modern warfare, even guerilla warfare. They cannot do such things as read maps, repair and maintain mechanical equipment, keep to organized schedules or carry out complex tactical maneuvers. By comparison, the front-line Sandinista combat troops include larger numbers of urban and working class youth who, whatever their morale, are better prepared for the tasks they face.

- no competent field commanders -  
no good staff  
of necessary*
2. The relatively low cultural level of the insurgent forces makes them especially unsuited to small unit guerilla operations. They need attentive leadership if they are to operate effectively. But the insurgents have not attracted adequate numbers of more educated and motivated junior commanders needed to lead these troops. The Sandinistas have many weaknesses of their own, but they have had time to turn a number of their young militants into effective field officers.

3. The lack of technical competency among the insurgents will make it difficult to introduce quantities of more modern weapons and communications into their effort. At a minimum, their troops will need substantial training.

- no skill  
- no passion  
- no vision*
4. The command structure of the FDN forces is still heavily influenced by figures from Nicaragua's old order. These leaders are not the brutes that some make them out to be, but they do not generate the enthusiasm and loyalty of which the insurgency is capable.

- 82nd Airborne syndrome*
5. The "proxy force" mentality lingers on in the insurgents' leadership -- a mentality that leads to caution, dependency and, perhaps, the unspoken expectation that sooner or later their U.S. patron will come in to do the job itself.

- 6. no strategy - no good staff - no direction no objectives*
6. These difficulties in the internal composition of the insurgent movement reflect political problems that persist in the movement's relations with both the larger Nicaraguan society and with Nicaragua's neighbors.

- no follow*
1. Despite the quiet satisfaction many urban and middle class Nicaraguans take from the existence of an anti-Sandinista insurgency, they do not regard it as theirs. It is not so much that the U.S. supports the insurgency as it is that the insurgency is a creature of the U.S. (and its former allies in the old regime.)



2. The insurgency has not sought close ties with democratic forces which remain on the "inside" in Nicaragua -- on the contrary, some of its leaders have scornfully urged members of Nicaragua's civic opposition to "come out." This may have been understandable when the presence of opponents in Managua and other urban centers could be exploited as testimony to the Sandinistas' democratic pretensions. But since the state of emergency was declared these pretensions have grown very thin. The insurgency now needs closer links to dissidents in the cities. The Sandinistas cannot be opposed successfully by a movement that operates only in the countryside; to be effective, the insurgency must develop an urban base.

*Entire  
urban cells*

3. Political conflicts among opponents of the Sandinista regime have brought armed opposition to a virtual stand-still on the Southern (Costa Rican) front. This permits the Sandinistas to concentrate their best forces against the FDN command on the Northern (Honduran) front, and gravely hinders the guerilla campaign.

*Southern front  
Atlantic front*

4. The limited political appeal of the insurgency diminishes the movement's standing in the eyes of the peoples who are Nicaragua's neighbors, enabling neighboring governments to at times show a destructive opportunism toward the logistical and communications needs of the insurgents.
5. Some Latin American governments which are critical to the success of the insurgency -- Venezuela, Colombia -- still give political excuses for holding back, while some Western European democracies -- Sweden, France -- even provide economic assistance to the Sandinistas. But every reasonable effort must be made to overcome this both by the U.S. and by the insurgents themselves.

#### What Can Be Done?

\* The Nicaraguan insurgents clearly need a major infusion of U.S. military assistance. But our arms and training will be useless unless the political and social character of the resistance is broadened and becomes stronger. It would be the most profound irresponsibility to train and equip guerilla fighters for a mission that is essentially futile. So long as their military operations rest upon so narrow a political base, the capacities of the insurgents will be gravely weakened.

In briefest outline, we believe that the political requirements for U.S. military assistance are:

1. Strengthen the Democratic Character of the Resistance.

Changes that could achieve this have been treated both by the Reagan Administration and key leaders of the insurgency as if their only value were their public relations usefulness here in the United States. We disagree. They are essential for military success in Nicaragua. Without such changes, the insurgency will never be truly Nicaraguan, nor will it be broadly popular. Nor, it needs hardly be said, will it win.

What, specifically, seems to be required is that:

- ✓ A. UNO must exercise full and effective command over all military forces and political activities. Divisions among resistance groups should be replaced by a more organic unity.
- ✓ B. A determined effort must begin at once to bring the political and military forces of the Southern Front into a close working relationship with UNO in all phases of its activities. A similar effort must be directed toward the popular leaders of Nicaragua's Indian and Creole communities.
- ✓ C. The monitoring and enforcement of the conduct of resistance forces with respect to human rights must begin in earnest. So far this program, which President Reagan pledged to insist upon in his letter last June to Congressman Dave McCurdy, has produced only the most modest beginnings.
- D. The insurgency must develop a determined program of propaganda and recruitment aimed at potential middle class and working class supporters. It must become an all-Nicaraguan movement, which draws upon the best qualities of all sectors of Nicaraguan society. It must overcome the danger of sociological isolation.
- E. Although such efforts must keep clear of direct involvement with the insurgents, non-violent civic protest and dissent should be encouraged throughout Nicaragua.

2. Mount an International Political Offensive

- ✓ A. Both the insurgents themselves and the United States government need a clear, simple statement of the goals and strategies of this campaign. It is impossible to win serious allies and supporters to an effort which is so closely guarded and ambiguous. — *Non-existent*

- B. The resistance greatly needs to improve its capacities for waging "the war of ideas." Response to Sandinista actions

*Political action*

and statements is often slow and inept. Too often the U.S. government fills the breach. A stronger presence in Washington on the part of UNO's political leaders could be very helpful. — *top notch lobbyist - not Baco, or UNO rep.*

Sandinista repression has now shattered any remaining illusions that Nicaragua has been moving -- in ways not understood by the ordinary observer -- in a humane and progressive direction. If their present campaign of repression can be successfully resisted, the Sandinistas will soon find themselves more isolated and more vulnerable to diplomatic, economic and internal political pressures. The United States government, together with Nicaraguan democratic leaders and all other friends of democracy, must undertake a massive campaign of public diplomacy and education to cut off support for the Sandinistas and to win support for the resistance.

- C. Democracy has grown stronger in Central and South America in the past year, and many of the region's democratic leaders show a clearer understanding of the Sandinista's role in fomenting violence and subversion. Because of this, there is a growing possibility that substantial ~~pressure can now be mounted through the Contadora process to push the Sandinistas toward democracy and negotiations.~~ *— Doubt / I realize I'd see it within* Our diplomacy should encourage a vigorous revival of the Contadora process, while adhering firmly to the conviction that peace and freedom will not be secure for the rest of Central America so long as the government of Nicaragua denies peace and freedom to its people. *wants broader action But the effort must be made*
- D. There appears <sup>to</sup> ~~to be~~ no organized "resistance support network" either in Central America or inside the United States. The Sandinistas have surely shown how helpful such networks can be. It seems likely that there are numbers of citizens who would like to be informed, write letters, pressure their Congressmen, etc. The "proxy war" mentality ignores such potential supporters such as these. Certainly more of an effort must be made by credible representatives of the resistance to reach and win the loyalty of citizens here in the United States. All this is equally true with respect to Central America.
- E. We think it would be advisable to create a high level, bi-partisan and broadly representative citizens' commission to act as a liason agency between the United States and Nicaragua's insurgents. There need to be many closer relationships between those active in the Nicaraguan resistance and the leaders of America's democratic movements and institutions: labor, business, the universities, civic organizations, etc. It would also be helpful to offset some of the spirit of partisan politics that weighs so heavily upon this effort. A blue ribbon Committee of Liason could help keep the American public informed in an unbiased way, could offer leadership and assistance to resistance leaders (not just conditions and complaints),
- Unus: get to get it all together!*

and could help a busy Congress and a strong-willed President shape more effective legislation and policy.

Paradoxical as it may seem, the kind of effort we envision would require greater, not less, U.S. involvement. But, in relative terms, our role would include more open political and diplomatic activity, and would not continue to be so much a matter of closeted logistical and tactical advice.

### 3. Give Substantial Military Assistance.

A Nicaraguan insurgency which moves rapidly toward becoming a genuinely popular political alternative to the Sandinistas will be destroyed unless it has the weapons and the training to defend itself against the Sandinistas massive and growing military power.

It will need sophisticated anti-aircraft weapons, including missiles. - Anti-tank and heavy mortar or artillery eventually

It will need the best quality intelligence.

It will need expert military training.

It will need assistance in developing better community service and political organizing expertise.

But an insurgency that is politically broader and more attractive can make good use of such aid, and, can, we believe restore the democratic promise of the Nicaraguan revolution.

• Logistics

• dependable pipeline for supplies -  
airdrop capability - so do not have to come out all the time.

• Advisors - 3rd Army in U.S.

### Section 4. U.S. Administration Role

Should add: The Admin. must clearly define goals, objectives - and its strategy

• Lack of Leadership

- Designated pointman for lobby effort - someone from the outside  
whose sole job is to orchestrate the admin & generate popular support - Report to Pres.

- Working Committee

- Designated qualified pointman to carry out the overall effort - not  
CIA, State, or DOD - military, political, business - NSC - prominent  
figure - report directly to the President & keep him on progress.

- an expert working person

The key to success for the democratic opposition will lie in adhering to the law of comparative advantage and establishing a structure which follows the rules of division of labor. Both of these concepts will be realized only if the UNO structure becomes truly representational of the needs of a broad disaffected Nicaraguan base, inside and out of Nicaragua. New Nicaraguan sources must be tapped who provide a dynamic that is missing in the rank and file of the democratic opposition. Likewise, individuals unwilling to accept the reality of a broad-based political opposition must be removed from the democracy building effort. At this point the Nicaraguan Democratic Force (FDN) does not endorse at large, is the need to rely heavily on political factors for success. The hardline image of the FDN must be remolded; no political balance shift will take place until that is achieved.

We must approach the Nicaraguan conflict from the perspective that the propaganda offensive has belonged to the Sandinistas until the present day. In the political equation of the FSLN vs. the democratic armed opposition, a viable southern front apart from the FDN will remove some of the propaganda advantage enjoyed by the Sandinistas. Similarly, we must gain the momentum of having the political opposition represent as wide a base as possible. We have failed until now in this regard. Arturo Cruz and Alfonso Robelo have not effectively pulled together that broad political base. They must move with energy and unselfishly to support for the cause NOT and not parochial interests.

It is most unfortunate that the Sandinistas have been able to fulfill the expectations of the good FSLN military leader, thereby limiting the pool of resources outside of former National Guard. In the military area, third country trainers/mercenaries are necessary to bring progressive military techniques to the armed cadre. It is critical that the trainers be acceptable to the Nicaraguans being trained. Military technology should match the target and qualifications of the user.

An all out effort must be made to push the internal opposition to push the FSLN to the limit. Linkages between the internal opposition political parties, the labor groups, ect., need to be strengthened with external counterparts throughout Latin America. The goal would naturally be to obtain public support. As examples, Cruz should attempt to reenter Nicaragua, Enrique Bolanos should meet first with the political opposition on the outside, and attempt to reenter Nicaragua. Once done, Bolanos should meet with the military opposition while simultaneously working to ensure that a public outcry will arise to the Sandinistas opposition to Bolanos. Many other examples exist wherein the internal opposition becomes dynamic again by their solidarity with the external opposition and vice versa.

1 &

In conclusion, the blatant disregard by one portion of the opposition must cease. Rather than encouraging the positive impact of having former members of the Sandinista government working to the advantage, they are shunned. While admittedly individuals such as Robelo and Cruz may have been mistaken in supporting the Sandinistas, no one can accuse them of not given the Sandinistas a chance. For the southern front, the formation of a joint political/military board will improve coordination problems and again, help improve the level of communications. A timetable for further U.S. actions needs to be established without giving the idea that the ultimate U.S. option is to mount an invasion. UNO should, once the political base is solidified, prepare to have competent representation in Washington, to Contadora and the respective countries, and as elsewhere as required. Above all else, UNO must sell its cause from one Latin to another; NOT as a pawn of the U.S. government.